

"Shamrock," The Porterfield Residence,
Vicksburg, Mississippi.

Warren Co

HABS No. 17 - 2

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 17

Historic American Buildings Survey
A. Hays Town, District Officer
Standard Life Building
Jackson, Mississippi

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SHAMROCK
The Porterfield Residence
Vicksburg, Warren Co.
Mississippi

Owner: Miss C.S.Porterfield.

Date of Erection: 1851.

Architect and Builder: No record.

Present Condition: Poor.

Number of Stories: Three.

Materials of Construction: Brick.

Other Existing Records: See text.

Additional Data: See following pages.

S H A M R O C K

The Old Porterfield Home

Vicksburg Warren County Mississippi

In the days just prior to the Civil War, Mississippi's architecture had turned from Greek simplicity to an attempt at splendor and show, employing as much cast ornament as surfaces would permit.

."Shamrock" is a good example of the transition period. The house proper is a square built three-story brick structure with identical verandae on both the river and the street fronts. The verandas each have six tall Doric pillars, springing from one story high square pedestals. Both the pillars and pedestals are stucco-covered brick and approach true Doric detail and proportions. The neck, however, is ornamented with flat acanthus leaves.

Above the columns is a massive wood entablature supporting a paneled wood parapet. The lines of this entablature and parapet are carried in brick across the main body of the house, and are broken only by two tall brick chimneys on each side elevation. At one time the veranda or porch floors at the second story level was surrounded by beautiful ornamental cast and wrought-iron railing, breaking in between the columns; part of the railings are still in place. There is a brick retaining wall on the street front and the grade is carried almost

S H A M R O C K

The Old Porterfield Home
Vicksburg Warren County Mississippi

The Porterfield House was erected in 1851 by William Porter. This gentleman was one of two brothers, William and John, who had come over from Ireland in the '30's. Their family name had been Porter in North Ireland. After being in America a while they added the last syllable to the name, making it "Porterfield". William Porter and John Porter had originated in County Tyrone, Ireland, near Strabane.

.When William Porterfield had the big house erected he called it "Shamrock" in honor of his native land. He married a daughter of Joe Davis, brother of Jefferson Davis. Because of this connection the Confederate chieftain visited the place before and after the Civil War on many occasions.

.During the War Grant shelled the house, thinking it was Pemberton's headquarters, but little damage was done. Only one shell is said to have fallen true to its mark.

.It seems its occupants managed to live in the place even through the siege to surrender in 1863. With the fall of Vicksburg, Grant's regiments camped and billeted upon the grounds of the home. The military occupancy seems to have covered two or three years. In the 1870's claims were filed against the government for property commandeered during that military occupancy. Many famous officers of both sides in the Civil War, including Albert Sidney Johnstone, had occasion to touch upon the home-place of William Porterfield.

.The house now belongs to Miss Christine Smedes Porterfield, and is unoccupied.

to the veranda line. In the center of the front wall on both elevations is a doorway motif framed in wood. At the third story doorways are cantilever balconies forming a unit with the doorways below. The balconies originally had ornamental iron railings similar to the ones of the verandas below.

.The side lights and transoms of the entrances are decorated with wood muntins separating small diamond-shaped panes of glass; the door panels themselves are formed with decorative cast composition ornaments; and there are cast planted ornaments on the entrance cornice mouldings. The porch ceilings are plastered and are divided into three panels each. All of the windows have exposed cast-iron lintels and wood shutters. The windows of the second and third stories open all the way down to the floor lines. The roof, which is seldom, if ever, seen, is slate.

.The interior is a symmetrical layout, having the typical "through" wide central hallways on each floor, but differing from the earlier plans in that this hall also served as the stair hall. The stairway starts on the ground floor with a clumsy newell and terminates in a well directly over this flight on the top floor. Each story stair is a single unbroken flight of steps directly against the hallway wall. The long narrow wells are formed by circle curves from the stair railing, with about one foot diameter at their intersection.

.On the fascia of the open stringers are planted wood-carved leaf designs; these occur at each riser and also continuously around the well fascia. On the ground floor to the left of the hall is a single long room, at one time two rooms, assumed because of the dropped center beam and the two mantels; on the right side are two rooms nearly square. The ceilings of this story are low.

.The floor here is 12"x 12" diagonally laid marble paving. The veranda floor of this story is brick, and on one front was likely used as a carriage drive.

.On the first floor (second story) are four almost square rooms, used as parlor, library on one side, drawing room and living room on the other, separated by large sliding doors. This story is more lavishly ornamented with doors and windows framed with broad wood pilasters, and decorated cornices. The plaster cornices here are adorned with acanthus corbels separated by plaster laurel wreaths, and banded by moulded cornice members with egg and dart and tongue members. On the third story (on second floor) are the bed rooms. This plan is the same as the one below, but there are no sliding doors, and most of the ornament is omitted. All of the door panels on the first floor are formed by bands of composition leaf ornaments planted on a flat mouldings.

.There is a fireplace in every room, but the mantels have been removed.

.In the early years, "Shamrock" gardens and grounds must have been beautiful, the vistas to the Yazoo and Mississippi Rivers were more or less unbroken, a proper setting for one of the South's proudest mansions.

.The house today is almost a complete wreck, and is probably condemned as unsafe by the City of Vicksburg. In all probability, if no attempt at restoration is made, another decade will find only a mass of ruins on the site of a show place of long ago.